

CLOTHING PROBLEMS AND INTERESTS EXPRESSED
BY A SELECTED GROUP OF WOMEN OVER SIXTY
YEARS OF AGE

by

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INTRODUCTION

Recent literature on aging is plentiful, but little has been written about clothing for the older woman. Much of the research on aging has been conducted with persons living in institutions or with selected groups that may or may not provide a true picture of the older population.

The investigator's previous work with the adult program of the Kansas Cooperative Extension Service seemed to indicate that older women had clothing problems which were age-related in addition to problems common to younger women. Experiences with older women also led the investigator to believe that market offerings affect clothing behavior. Older women appeared to regard clothing services provided for their age groups as inadequate. It was hoped that an investigation of expressed clothing problems and practices could be compared with similar research and thus provide a link in the chain leading to improved market offerings for women over sixty years of age.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. Research findings (8, 17, 21, 22, 23), pertinent literature (2, 4, 9), and personal observations indicate that clothing has an important effect on one's mental perspective. This study was designed to examine clothing experiences of women sixty years old or over and to

compare results with a study made by Bader (22) in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1963 and with other related studies (21, 23). It was assumed that older women resist an age-related identity which reflects a stigma in a youth-oriented society; and that while these women may have specific physiological clothing needs, other needs are similar to those of younger counterparts.

Purposes of the study. The purposes of the investigation were (1) to learn about the interest in and importance of clothing to older women; (2) to identify factors older women say are problems when they shop; (3) to learn what services older women would like to have when they shop; and (4) to compare findings with those reported in similar studies.

Definitions of terms used. Throughout the report of this investigation, certain terms shall be interpreted with certain meanings. The term "aging" shall be interpreted as meaning the complex changes which appear to result from a series of processes simultaneously taking place in the body throughout the life span. The term "clothing behavior" shall be interpreted as indicating the behavior caused by clothing experiences, and "clothing experiences" shall be interpreted to include all that has happened to the woman as a result of her clothing. The term "poor" shall be interpreted as meaning those whose basic needs exceed their means to satisfy

them.

Areas of residence shall be designated as either "rural farm," "rural-non-farm," or "urban." The term "rural farm" shall be interpreted as including those living in the country and engaged in agriculture. The term "rural-non-farm" shall be interpreted as including those living in rural areas and/or towns of under 5,500 population who are not engaged in agriculture. The term "urban" shall be interpreted as including those living in cities of 5,500 or more population.

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

Discussion of aging. Life has not ended for the elderly, but it may have changed. The woman whose age is between sixty and seventy-four is generally self-sufficient, is in better health, has better financial resources, and is more socially competent than a woman seventy-five years of age or over. The woman from sixty to seventy-four years old often lives alone or with her husband in an urban area. There is continued need of clothing that fulfills her physical, psychological, social, and economic needs and values according to Shack (8). Metraux emphasized that very few irregularities in behavior and belief are absolutely related to old age. Ideas about the behavior and relationships of old people have been largely man-made and learned from society (1). Metraux granted that after retirement people may just watch television and be concerned about a good meal, but the older person need not be relegated to the stereotype portrayed by Red Skelton in his pantomime of the little old man with stooped shoulders and measured gait, or the pathetic figure of Shakespeare's King Lear after he "retired" his throne (1). Gerontological research has demonstrated that aging is not necessarily associated with deterioration and disease. Physiological and psychological studies reported in "The Role of Research in Solving Problems of the Aged" by Shack (8) showed that many common beliefs about the impairment of older people are with-

out basis in fact.

Importance of clothing to the aged. Stone and Form stated that the social importance of clothing and its effect on dress cannot be ignored, for dress loses half its meaning if not seen and appreciated by others (13). According to these same researchers, the importance women attach to clothing because it is visible and will be evaluated by others emphasizes its social character (13). Crawley in Dress, Drinks, and Drums also indicated the social significance of dress by pointing out that women wear their best clothes for social occasions (2). According to Langner in The Importance of Wearing Clothes, clothing embraces almost every aspect of human behavior and has affected most social activities and institutions throughout the ages (4). Charitable organizations have long recognized that second only to proper food and shelter is the need for decent clothing to improve a man's ability to help himself (4).

Robin, head of the dermatology department of Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, in a presentation of findings before the American Medical Women's Association, reported that women dress and use make-up to impress other women or be admired by their peers, to stay young-looking, to increase their feeling of well-being, to build their egos, because it is the thing to do, because of a conscious or unconscious rivalry for men, and to triumph over physical limitations of the body (26).

Jersild related: "Sometimes directly, sometimes more subtly, a person's clothes and grooming are a projection of himself--his real self or an idealized self which he is striving to live up to" (3). Bader found that interest in clothing, for the most part, had not been lost because of age; and older women were more in need of attractive clothing because of figure changes. Clothing worn at home showed that most women in this age group dressed up when staying at home. Dressing up in the afternoon was attributed to habit since older women showed the greatest tendency to follow this practice (22).

Belting and Rosencranz found that buying clothing had a psychological effect, made women happier, and was a defense against aging. Subjects were interested in style changes and fashion magazines, and they did not mind time used in shopping for clothing (21). Ryan stated that habits and interests of earlier years remained the same regardless of chronological age, and that psychological needs fulfilled by clothing were the same for the elderly as for other age groups (6).

Cosmetic changes during aging. Growing old is a continuous process which goes on regardless of world events or personal feelings. Even though the outward graces may be evident for some time, certain cosmetic changes take place which cause clothing problems. Women in this category fret over expanding waistlines and graying hair. Blair, in a study of 361 women between forty-five and sixty-five years of age, found

that half of these women weighed an average of nineteen to twenty pounds more than the ideal weight for their height and bone structure. Sixty-four per cent of her respondents complained that thickened waistlines made it difficult for them to buy desirable clothes. Other changes in body contour which caused fitting problems for these women were: sagging breasts, 47 per cent; heavy upper arms, 36 per cent; round shoulders, 33 per cent; and dowager's hump, 18 per cent. Larger size garments and patterns which accommodated the larger bust, waist, and hip measures were too large in the shoulders and too long in body length. Middle-aged women need garments slightly longer in back and fuller in the armscye to accommodate rounded shoulders and fat deposits around the back and shoulders. Garments should also be proportionately larger in the waist and hips and have a lower bust placement than is standard (17). Ryan implied that body changes experienced by the aged cause fitting problems because standard measurements are based upon measurements of younger women (6). Tate and Glisson stated that enlarged waistlines caused difficulty when purchasing clothes and recommended half-size dresses as a partial answer to this need (10). Respondents in the Bartley study frequently expressed a need for alterations necessitated by enlarged waistlines. Round shoulders were also reported as a common figure change in the aged. Because of changes in body contour which cause clothing problems for the middle-aged woman, current styles are often

better suited to younger women (23). Stein, president of Caprito Pants, Inc., commented in Women's Wear Daily that while nobody is really old today, the "ye-ye" and "Mod" looks are not for the mature woman past forty. Most of the "new generation" styling cannot be made in sizes larger than fourteen. While the over sixty-five age group will continue to grow in the next decade, emphasis in styling will still be youthful (27).

Morton, in her book The Arts of Costume and Personal Appearance, stated that an older woman's clothes should be designed to give a rounding and softening effect on the face and a slimming effect on the body. Wrinkles and loose skin demand fabrics and colors that de-emphasize rather than accentuate them. The white-haired lady who knows how to make the best of her potentialities can eclipse even the youthful beauty (5). Morton continued that the wearing of glasses will change appropriate hat shapes; and lumbago and arthritis will dictate the need for garments that are more comfortable, easier to put on, and lighter in weight around the shoulders. Most women find dresses with zippers down the back hard to fasten, but this is especially true for the older woman. Comfortable shoes and full-length foundations are also used. The aging woman's wardrobe becomes more stable and fewer clothes are purchased. More lasting qualities in style and less interest in fads is expressed. Since the wardrobe is smaller, it becomes even more essential for it to be complete and becoming. There is as wide a variation in the clothing preferences of

the elderly as there is for any age group (5).

The older woman and the market. Aside from a flurry some years ago, very little interest has been shown in the older person as a consumer. Advertisements directed to the middle-aged about financial preparation for retirement are plentiful, but there is little evidence that industry is taking seriously the production of goods or services to be used exclusively by older women. Yet, this group forms an ever-increasing segment of our population which Revelle, a prominent oceanographer and educator who is now professor of population policy and director of the Center for Population Studies at Harvard University, estimated will reach 98,304 billion by the year 2400 in comparison with only three billion in 1960 (25). World population is doubling every thirty years. This prodigious rate of increase is, in part, the result of "death control" through medicine and health measures and increased ability to produce food and other necessities. Every day over a thousand men and women in the United States pass their sixty-fifth birthday (14, 15). In 1900 there were only three million persons who had survived to age sixty-five. By 1959 this number had increased to fifteen and four-tenths million, and by 1975 it is estimated that there will be over twenty and five-tenths million age sixty-five and over (16). There are twice as many people in the United States today as there were in 1900 but nearly four times as many in

the sixty-five and over category (14).

Producers who have recognized the increase in the number of aged and, therefore, their potential as a market group, point to the amount of money available for the purchase of goods as a barrier to sales. Ebeling and Rosencranz found the majority of women would enjoy having more money to spend on clothes (21).

Strong forces tend to obliterate the difference in spending patterns of different age groups and classes. According to Ellis, these include mass communication of fashion ideas and innovations; mass distribution of goods and services; general improvement in education; and growth in urbanization (11). Pennock stated that expenditures for clothing were two percentage points less in 1961 than in 1941. She conceded that relative stability accounted for some of this change, but that adoption of a more casual style of dressing was a more important factor (12). In former generations only a privileged few could meaningfully look forward to a life in retirement which did not mean becoming dependent on family, friends, public assistance, or private charity. Today, retirement benefits or retirement pensions accrue as the right of retired persons. Social Security, with its program of Old-Age Survivors Insurance, is only one of the programs that have given economic freedom to the aged. The clothing manufacturer is missing a much needed market that could be lucrative for him. Although few of the aged patronize expensive

lines, Warden stated that there is more profit in the lower-priced, volume line of garments than in couture lines (24).

Bader quoted Brill's account of the thinking of merchandisers in regard to the older market as:

I know there is one group of marketing men who view the Senior Citizens' market as 'more of the same' market, considering it unwise to single out oldsters for especially directed efforts, seeing no difference between its demands and the others of our population.

There is another group that avoids age identification, feeling it wise to do so, but resorts to indirect or subtle means to interest Senior Citizens in products they sell that are of particular service to them.

There is a third group--an ever increasing one--that sees this as a sizeable and growing market offering great business potentialities with its constituents being of a different psychology and having indicated needs, calling for special direction and handling (18).

The general consensus seems to be that the aged are difficult to sell because they are often short of spendable funds; resist identification; already own much of what they want; and, regardless of added years, feel like and want to be treated like everyone else. As shoppers, they show a certain amount of sales resistance and look for quality.

Campbell indicated that the seeming disinterest of older people in market offerings may be due to the fact that goods and services have been slanted toward the younger customer (19). The problem of clearly identifying the wants and needs of this group was pointed out by Dodge when he stated that a clearer differentiation may be observed in accordance with the attained age of the older person; the older the person, the

more identifiable his wants tend to be (20). Subjects in the Dodge study stated salespeople were sometimes indifferent to older people and one-third of the subjects found difficulty in finding proper fit and style (20). Bader found that one-half of her subjects were satisfied with stock in stores while one-third expressed dissatisfaction with stock. Design or style and fit were more important than price or ease of care (22).

Stone and Form found women who were highly educated had a greater tendency to enjoy shopping (13). Bader found one-half of the women in her study enjoyed shopping and one-half did not enjoy shopping, and that enjoyment of shopping lessened as age increased. Reasons for not liking to shop were becoming tired easily, not wanting to spend time shopping, and not being able to find clothing to fit or clothing they liked. Two-thirds of the women in the Bader study indicated they wore house dresses for home wear and were critical of those on the market saying they were too fussy, without pockets, sleeves were not long enough, and prints were uninteresting (22). Bader found no relationship between educational attainment and liking to shop, nor did income appear to be a factor; however, those with low incomes were also older women and there was an age relationship within the income and shopping relationship. An intangible element in shopping was suggested (22).

Treatment received in stores was also a factor in

liking or not liking to shop. Fifty-nine per cent of the subjects in the Bader study felt they were courteously treated by sales people, but some felt they were given less attention because of age. Forty (66.4 per cent) indicated the way they were dressed made a difference and felt it was more important to be dressed well in a town where they were not known (22). Other responses given in the Bader study were that clerks sized up the customer from her appearance and helped the well-dressed customer sooner. All subjects dressed up for going out, but one-fourth of the women had someone else shop for them. Subjects in the study used approval service because they could show garments to their husbands, had more time to decide on the purchase, and could coordinate garments with those already in their wardrobes. There was some mail order buying and some women ordered from newspaper advertisements, catalogues, and flyers from stores. Ibeling and Rosencranz reported that most subjects window shopped; that design and fit were more important than price or ease of care; and that they wanted a larger selection of dresses from which to choose (21).

Skills in interviewing the aged. Selltitz emphasized that the interviewer must ask every question exactly as worded in the interview schedule. While one should not avoid interviewing a subject who might be difficult to interview, neither should one interview a woman when her husband is present.

Interviewers of the aged must be alert and find ways to encourage the older person to communicate her clothing problems and her feelings about them. Patience in establishing rapport is necessary for successful interviews (7).

PROCEDURE

Selecting the sample. The writer found four groups of women suitable for study in Manhattan, Kansas. These groups were the retired faculty members, Farmers' Wives Club members, Golden Age Club members, and Faculty Mothers Club members. The Golden Age Club group which consisted of ninety women members who were sixty or more years of age with varied religious faiths, incomes, occupational and educational backgrounds and sponsored by the First Methodist Church of Manhattan, Kansas, was selected as the universe for this investigation.

Consecutive odd numbered names were selected until a population of thirty was secured from the alphabetized membership list. Three attempts were made by telephone to contact subjects for appointments. If there was no answer after three calls, or if the individual did not wish to cooperate, the even numbered name preceding the original selection was contacted. The interviewer discovered that it was not wise to call for appointments more than two days in advance as subjects did not like to be committed for a greater length of time and in some cases forgot the appointment.

Method used to obtain data. Personal interviews were used to obtain information. This method provided the opportunity to observe the subject in the total living situation and provided an opportunity for the interviewer to clarify

questions which the respondent did not understand.

Developing and administering the interview schedule.

Questions developed for the interview schedule were similar to those in "An Exploratory Study of Clothing Problems and Attitudes of a Group of Older Women in Iowa City, Iowa" by Bader (22). Questions with fixed choice responses were combined with open end questions. An interview schedule may be found in the Appendix. Preliminary interview schedules were administered to twelve women sixty-five years of age or over who lived in Manhattan, Kansas, and who were not members of the Golden Age Club. Approximately thirty minutes was required to administer each schedule. Questions of a personal nature regarding characteristics of the subject were placed at the end of the schedule.

Treatment of data. The data were tabulated to facilitate the handling of information. A study of the data was made to determine associations between age, income, education, and occupations of the subjects and their clothing attitudes and problems and to compare these findings with similar studies in other localities. Results were expressed in percentages and reported in tables and/or narrative form.

FINDINGS

Description of respondents. Respondents consisted of thirty active women who ranged from sixty-two to eighty-six years of age. A number and percentage distribution by age group is shown in Table I. Most respondents were proud to tell how old they were, but one woman felt it was rude to ask one's age. There was little complaint expressed over growing old. Very few respondents viewed themselves in the "old" category. Respondents generally reserved this classification for people in retirement or nursing homes which respondents visited regularly, and for which they provided entertainment.

TABLE I
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION
OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE GROUP^a

Age Group	Number	Percentage
61-70	8	27
71-80	14	47
81-90	7	23

^aOne respondent did not reveal her age.

The period of residence of respondents in Manhattan ranged from four to seventy-seven years with an average residence of thirty-five years. Before moving to Manhattan, twenty-three respondents (77 per cent) had lived in an urban area; four (13 per cent) had lived on farms; and three (10

per cent) had lived in rural non-farm communities. Nineteen respondents (63 per cent) were widowed, ten (33 per cent) lived with their husbands, and one was single.

Most subjects were reluctant to discuss the amount of their yearly income with the interviewer. Approximately one-fourth of the subjects declined to divulge the amount of their income. All but one of those reporting income indicated a yearly amount of less than \$6,000. All respondents received social security which was supplemented by other income. Observation of living conditions indicated that none of the subjects was destitute. The situation was described clearly by the respondent who remarked, "When I want or need something beyond my monthly income, I cash a bond. I don't do it without thought, but I have what I need."

When questioned about employment, twenty-four women (80 per cent) said they had worked for pay at some time in their lives but were not working now; three (10 per cent) had never worked outside their homes; and three (10 per cent) were working at the time of the interviews. Subjects' past and/or present occupations are classified in Table II. All respondents did their own housework although some said they had assistance with heavy work.

TABLE II

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY EMPLOYMENT
CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECTS

Type of Occupation	Employment			
	Number previously employed	Percentage	Number presently employed	Percentage
Professional	10	33	0	0
Clerical, Sales	9	30	2	7
Executive, Managerial	2	7	0	0
Household Help	2	7	1	3
Craftsmen, Operators	1	3	0	0

The educational attainment reported for respondents ranged from some grade school to work beyond a master's degree. This is presented in Table III. Thirteen respondents (43 per cent) had education beyond high school; six (20 per cent) were high school graduates; and eleven (37 per cent) had less education. Respondents who had less than a high school education were reluctant to divulge this fact. Only six women (20 per cent) interviewed had not attended high school.

TABLE III
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL
ATTAINMENT OF SUBJECTS

Educational Attainment	Number	Percentage
Some grade school	1	3
Grade school graduate	5	17
Some high school	5	17
High school graduate	6	20
Some college ^a	6	20
College graduate ^b	7	23

^aAttended institutes or short courses after high school.

^bIncluded two subjects with master's degrees and one with work toward a doctor's degree.

Since the sample was drawn from an organization roll, all subjects belonged to at least one organization. Seventeen of the women interviewed (57 per cent) belonged to five or less organizations while thirteen (43 per cent) held membership in six to nine organizations. The types of organizations to which respondents belonged are listed in Table IV. Twenty-two of the respondents (73 per cent) reported that they dressed the same for attendance at meetings or functions of all organizations. Respondents reported that special dress was required for attending Country Club, Business Women's Guild, Eastern Star, Domestic Science Club, Golden Age Club, and church functions. Comments indicated that while respondents were socially active, they were selective in choosing organizations to which

they belonged. None indicated that they would avoid an organizational function because of the lack of appropriate clothing.

TABLE IV

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO MEMBERSHIP IN VARIOUS TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Type of Organization	Number	Percentage
Organizations for aged	30	100
Church	24	80
Lodges	19	63
Neighborhood clubs	19	63
Special interest	17	57
Church affiliated	10	33
Professional groups	5	17

Twenty-two women (73 per cent) were emphatic in stating that they spent very little time alone. Eight (27 per cent) reported that they spent more time alone than with others.

Clothing problems and interests. Respondents were equally divided in liking and disliking to shop. Little agreement was observed between age and enjoyment of shopping; however, all the subjects who disliked shopping said that the inability to find what they wanted was one of the reasons. They also became frustrated and tired during the "hunt." Reasons for disliking to shop are presented in Table V. A complete

list of problems encountered by subjects while shopping is given in the Appendix.

TABLE V

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS
GIVEN BY RESPONDENTS DISLIKING TO SHOP

Reason	Number	Percentage
Inability of respondent to find wanted item	15	50
Shopping is tiring to respondent	5	17
Inability of respondent to obtain satisfactory fit and style	5	17
Respondent has never enjoyed shopping	2	7
Shopping made respondent nervous	2	7
Shopping makes respondent disgusted	2	7
Respondent "wants to get it over with"	1	3
Respondent dislikes getting used to new things	1	3
Respondent dislikes trying on garments	1	3
Respondent thinks styles are either too young or too old	1	3

Respondents who liked to shop were just as positive about their reasons as those who disliked shopping. Reasons given by respondents are shown in Table VI.

When income and shopping attitudes were compared, six (20 per cent) with incomes under \$3,000 liked to shop, and five (17 per cent) disliked shopping. Six (20 per cent) subjects with incomes between \$3,000 and \$6,000 liked to shop while five (17 per cent) disliked shopping. One woman (3 per cent) in the over \$6,000 income range liked to shop. The other seven respondents did not reveal their income.

TABLE VI

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS
GIVEN BY RESPONDENTS LIKING TO SHOP

Reason	Number	Percentage
Respondent likes to shop	15	50
Respondent likes to see new clothing and fabrics	10	33
Respondent finds it important to have suitable clothes	10	33
Respondent has more time to shop and more money for clothes	8	27
Respondent likes to spend money	1	3

When educational attainment and shopping attitudes were compared, four (13 per cent) of those with grade school education liked to shop and three (10 per cent) disliked shopping. Of those with high school educations, six (20 per cent) liked shopping and five (17 per cent) disliked shopping. Five (17 per cent) of those with college educational attainment liked shopping and seven (23 per cent) disliked shopping.

Table VII presents this data.

TABLE VII

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS'
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND LIKING
AND DISLIKING TO SHOP

Educational attainment	Like to shop		Dislike shopping	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Grade school	4	13	3	10
High school	6	20	5	17
College	5	17	7	23

Treatment of respondents by sales clerks in stores had impact on the pleasure derived from shopping. Group consensus seemed to indicate that it was important to be neatly groomed and appropriately dressed at all times. Twenty respondents (67 per cent) felt that the way they were dressed when shopping made a difference in treatment received from sales people. Eight women (27 per cent) felt that grooming and dress made no difference in the way they were treated in stores as they were personally acquainted with sales personnel and were given good service. Five subjects (17 per cent) felt they were often passed by for the younger customer; three (10 per cent) felt it depended on the store and they dressed accordingly; two (7 per cent) felt their dress was evaluated as a gauge for sales potential and directly affected the attention they were given.

The women interviewed expressed appreciation for sales

people who telephoned customers when the store received merchandise suitable for them. Two (7 per cent) did comment that the older customer was more apt to buy because the effort to go shopping was greater, and that the customer also had an obligation when shopping to disprove the stereotype that older people are poor customers.

Twenty-four respondents (80 per cent) reported that they shopped alone while six (20 per cent) shopped with someone. Seventeen (57 per cent) of the subjects investigated relied on their own judgment when making a shopping decision even if they asked someone else for an opinion. They considered consulting others a matter of courtesy or conversation. Eleven respondents (37 per cent) felt that the advice of husband, daughter, or friend was reliable while only two would rely on a clerk's opinion. One woman remarked that since her husband had to look at her, he should be consulted before she made a decision. She sometimes sent him to bring clothes to her on approval. Few women expressed a real desire for the support of others when shopping or less confidence in their own judgment because of age. Several considered shopping a social activity and felt it was courteous to ask the opinion of a shopping companion even though they would not change their minds if they did not like the dress themselves.

Out-of-town shopping reported by ten women (33 per cent) occurred because respondents could not find what they

wanted locally or because they shopped when visiting in another city. Twenty-six subjects (87 per cent) said they preferred department stores over available specialty shops because more shopping could be done in one store, prices were more favorable, and there was less pressure to buy; but such statements were qualified as the women said they would shop until they found what they wanted and often shopped both type stores. There was little evidence of enthusiasm for mail order shopping although eight women (27 per cent) used such a service at times, especially for sales advertised in papers or for writing stores which would send garments on approval.

When questioned about the use of store services, five women (17 per cent) indicated that they would use an approval privilege because they could show a garment to their husbands, coordinate articles with those already in their wardrobes, try on garments at their leisure, and select merchandise from out-of-town stores without traveling. They could have more time for decisions without inconveniencing sales people. Five respondents (17 per cent) indicated that they would use a personal shopping service now if it were available while five (17 per cent) indicated that such a service would be helpful when they got older and could not shop personally. Only two (7 per cent) reported using delivery service. When asked if they would use a specialty shop for their age group, twenty (67 per cent) reported enthusiastically that they would if

they could get better fit and styling. Little concern was expressed about being set apart as an age group and some commented that it would be an excellent way to get interesting, well-styled garments that fit without going through racks of garments styled for youth. They were concerned less about where garments were sold than they were about finding clothes that were suitable and becoming to them.

Twenty-four respondents (80 per cent) felt that merchants did not give enough attention to the mature woman when they stocked merchandise, five (17 per cent) were satisfied, and one had not thought about it. Recommendations respondents would make to merchants for improving stock included a wider range of styles; more half-sizes; more in-between styles that are neither strictly house dresses nor dress-up dresses; more styles in half-size garments (one respondent remarked that styles were either for Grandmas or teen-agers); small sizes in styles suitable for mature women; more ease in skirts without excessive pleating or gathering at the waist; shortened waist length and larger circumference without increasing neck, bust, and shoulder measurements; longer skirts; dresses with sleeves; smaller prints; colors suitable for aging complexions; pockets; front openings; better labeling including fiber content; instructions for care; better quality and more attention to grain and finish; fabrics that breathe and resist pilling; improved control of stock distribution so that fewer women in

a given area have the same dress; and improved alteration service. There was no indication of a relationship between expressed dissatisfaction and age, income, or activity. Generally, changes in appearance caused by age were accepted, but there was a definite feeling of inability to purchase clothing that would help such women look their best.

When asked to designate the factor most important when selecting clothes, there was some hesitation on the part of respondents because they said that all of the factors listed were important. After careful consideration the answers listed in Table VIII were given by the respondents. Those indicating becomingness reasoned that becomingness included comfort and that a garment would be expensive at any price if it were not becoming. Ease of care and wearing qualities were not rationalized as easily. Women of all ages complained that there were too many dresses alike in stores, garments did not fit properly, and that a need for wider variety in styles existed.

TABLE VIII

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACTORS RESPONDENTS
CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT WHEN SELECTING CLOTHES

Factor	Number	Percentage
Becomingness	21	70
Comfort	5	17
Cost	2	7
Wearing quality	1	3
Fashion	1	3

When asked the period in life when they considered clothes most important, thirteen women (43 per cent) selected the present; ten (33 per cent), their early adult life; three (10 per cent), no difference throughout life; two (7 per cent), middle life; and two (7 per cent), the teens. Those selecting later years said they now have more time, more money, and a greater need for attractive attire since they have more figure faults to overcome. A number and percentage distribution of respondents and the periods when clothes were most important is given in Table IX.

TABLE IX

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR PERIOD WHEN CLOTHING WAS MOST IMPORTANT TO RESPONDENTS

Period when clothing was most important	Number	Percentage
Teens	2	7
Early adult	10	33
Middle	2	7
Present	13	43
Same	3	10

When asked how much importance they attached to dressing up, twenty-four women (30 per cent) said they dressed up even though they planned to stay at home alone. Four sometimes dressed up and two never did unless they were going out. The most common reasons reported for this practice were that

they wanted to be presentable if company should come or to be ready to leave the house. One respondent spoke for many when she said: "It is a habit. When I grew up, no one was allowed downstairs unless properly dressed. We owe it to our family to be neat and well dressed at the breakfast table and throughout the day." Others felt that dressing up was a morale booster and stated that they felt better when they looked better. One respondent who kept roomers felt that she should be dressed up; another dressed up for her husband.

When respondents were asked what type clothing they preferred for home wear, twenty-five (83 per cent) answered house dresses; two (7 per cent), old good dresses; two (7 per cent), house coats; and one (3 per cent), slacks. Those who answered "house dresses" qualified their statements by saying that they did not mean "just a kitchen dress" but something that could be worn to the store, for a ride, or to visit a neighbor. Dresses made of cotton, jersey, or washable fabrics were most often worn by women during interviews. Respondents criticized house dresses that are on the market and said they were often unattractive, poorly made, without sleeves, and made of cheap fabric. Women who had formerly worked outside the home remarked that while they had anticipated not dressing up everyday when they stopped work, they found that they were more comfortable and happier when they did. Three women made dresses for home wear but added they would buy such dresses

if they could find what they wanted. Other respondents said they were no longer interested in home sewing.

Fashion interest was indicated by twenty-eight respondents (93 per cent) who said they read fashion news in newspapers and magazines and by twenty-six (87 per cent) who discuss fashion with their friends. Responses indicated that the women were aware of current fashions, familiar with market offerings, evaluated their wardrobes and wanted to make wise choices when additions were made to their wardrobes.

Problems in interviewing. Respondents found it difficult to keep a list of factors in mind long enough to answer questions. This problem was solved by giving the respondents a list of factors which could be held and read. Probing was necessary when respondents said they did not know the answer. The verbosity and impaired hearing of some subjects made it difficult to terminate some interviews.

COMPARISON OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In comparing the 1963 Bader study (22) made in Iowa City, Iowa, the 1962 Bartley study (23) made in Manhattan, Kansas, and the 1960 Abel and Rosencrans study (21) made in Lansing, Michigan, with the present study, many similarities were noted. Subjects in the four studies were sixty or more years of age. The income, social activity, and educational level were thought to be above average for those interviewed in the studies. Subjects in this study did not sense a stigma against organizations for the aged, nor did they avoid social functions because of the lack of clothing. None of the Bader subjects belonged to an organization for the aged and many were concerned over being set aside as an age group (22). Abel and Rosencrans found the lack of appropriate clothing to wear reduced the amount of social participation (21). Findings suggest that women who accept changes that come with aging also accept clothing available to them and do not let it curb their social participation.

Respondents in this study were equally divided in liking and disliking shopping which agreed with findings in the Bader study. Little agreement was observed between age, income, or education and shopping attitudes in this study; however, Bader reported an effect of an age relationship within the income and shopping enjoyment relationship. Income also appeared to be a factor determining enjoyment of shopping in

the Bader study (22). Ebeling and Rosencranz found subjects with more money to spend for clothes frequently used shopping as a morale booster. Most of the subjects enjoyed window shopping and did not mind the time spent shopping for clothing (21). This led to the conclusion that shopping for clothing has an intangible element. Some women find the act of shopping for clothes pleasurable while others need to purchase clothing as well as shop for it to receive the same satisfaction.

Respondents in this study reported treatment received in stores had impact on the pleasure derived from shopping, and that age and the way they were dressed affected treatment they received while shopping. Subjects expressed an obligation for disproving the stereotype that older people are set in their ways and are poor buyers. These findings agreed with findings reported by Bader (22). Older women feel both the stigma of a youth-oriented society and a responsibility for being agreeable customers.

Few subjects in this study showed less confidence in their judgment because of age. More than half of the women relied on their own advice even when they asked someone else for an opinion and considered consulting others a matter of courtesy or conversation. Bader's subjects also liked advice when shopping but indicated it was more important for them to like the dress themselves (22). The women investigated knew what they wanted and considered selecting a dress which was

suitable for them more important than the social aspect of shopping.

Approval service, shopping service, and mail order buying were used by a small segment of subjects in this study; however, more than half of the subjects said they would use a specialty shop for their age group if they could get better fit and styling. No concern was expressed over being set aside as an age group. Bader's subjects showed a similar interest in store services but were concerned over the possibility of being set aside as an age group if they patronized a specialty shop for older women (22). There is a need for specialty shops which supply suitable sizes and styles for mature women. The stigma of being set aside as an age group would be minimized if clothing needs were met.

Two-thirds of the subjects in this study reported merchants did not give enough attention to mature women when selecting merchandise and expressed a definite feeling of not being able to purchase clothing that would help the mature woman look her best. Subjects reported market offerings did not provide enough half-size dresses in becoming styles for mature women. Changes that come with age were accepted, yet frustration over their appearance was expressed. Becomingness was reported as a major factor when selecting clothing. Bader's subjects also indicated dissatisfaction with merchandise available in stores and reported a need for more half-sizes in smartly styled dresses. Fit was the factor considered most

important when selecting clothes (22). Bartley reported women were partially satisfied with merchandise available in Manhattan stores. Subjects reported becomingness an important factor when selecting clothing and reported half-size dresses fit better (23). Tbeling and Rosencranz reported subjects could find dresses in their sizes but found selection limited (21). These findings lead to the conclusion that figure changes that come with age require measurements that are generally found in half-sizes and that the available supply of half-sizes in smart styles is limited.

Subjects in the present study indicated the importance of clothes when they reported they wanted to be presentable at all times and felt better when they looked better. They dressed up even when they planned to stay at home alone. House dresses were worn when staying at home and were criticized because of style, workmanship, and quality. Dresses of cotton, jersey, and washable fabrics were worn most often during the interviews. Bader reported similar findings (22). Bartley reported comfort, becomingness, and ease of care were important factors considered when selecting house dresses and suggested that women preferred attractive style in preference to ease of care. Jersey was one of the fabrics most often selected for dresses by subjects (23). There is confusion over the meaning of the term "house dresses." Subjects in this study specified that they did not mean a "kitchen dress." They wanted something that could be worn to the store or when

visiting a friend. There is a need for a wider selection of dresses that meet this requirement.

Subjects in this study reported clothes were more important to them now than they had been during any other period in life. They now have more time to shop, more money to spend, and a greater need for attractive attire because of the cosmetic changes that come with age. The Bader study also reported subjects considered clothing important at their present age and stated older women might be excluded from activities or judged to be older than their chronological age if they were careless about their appearance (22). Ebeling and Rosen-
cranz reported subjects felt others gave attention to the kind of clothes they wore (21).

Older women are aware of cosmetic changes that come with age and their related clothing problems; however, it must be realized that women of all ages sometimes complain of fitting problems and a poor selection of merchandise. Interest in clothing remains as it has been in earlier life, yet the women may have less energy available to enjoy this interest. Older women know what they want, but market offerings are limited in sizes and styles which meet this need. Subjects studied were interested in clothing and did not show less concern about their appearance because of age.

SUMMARY

This study of clothing problems of the aged was conducted during the summer of 1966. The sample consisted of thirty women who were members of the Golden Age Club sponsored by the First Methodist Church, Manhattan, Kansas. Data were obtained by means of personal interviews. Interviews took approximately thirty minutes each.

Subjects ranged from sixty-two to eighty-six years of age and had lived in Manhattan from four to seventy-seven years. Rural and urban backgrounds did not appear to influence responses. Incomes reported by twenty-three of the respondents were: eleven under \$3,000; eleven from \$3,000 to \$6,000; and one reporting over \$6,000. Nineteen respondents were widows; ten lived with their husbands; and one was single. Most of the interviewees were well educated. Thirteen respondents had education beyond high school; six respondents were high school graduates; five respondents had some high school; and six had not attended high school. Two-thirds of the women in the study felt the way they dressed when shopping affected the treatment they received from sales clerks. Three-fourths of the subjects shopped alone; those who consulted others when shopping said they did so as a matter of courtesy but relied on their own judgment when making a decision. Few expressed the desire for the opinion of others when shopping or felt less confidence in their own judgment

because of age. Ten women sometimes shopped out of town. Twenty-six preferred department stores over specialty shops; although they shopped in both types of stores. However, twenty subjects reported that they would use a specialty shop designed for their age group if they could get better fit and styling. Little concern was expressed over the possibility of being identified as an age group if they should shop in this type of store.

Major problems encountered by respondents when shopping were fit, styling, lack of variety, and poor color selections for aging complexions. Twenty-two respondents indicated that merchants did not give enough thought to the mature woman's clothing needs and preferences when selecting stock for their stores. Subjects recommended that merchants increase the number of styles stocked in half-sizes, provide smart clothing appropriate for the mature woman, give more attention to quality of fabric, and provide a more efficient alteration service. Factors frequently mentioned were those common to younger women; although age as a factor cannot be discounted when one considers expressed problems of merchandise styled for young people, monotonous styling in available half-sizes, and attitudes of merchants and sales personnel towards older women as customers.

Services desired by older women also indicated an age-related factor. Subjects were not concerned over being set

aside as an age group and would welcome specialty shops which would provide suitable, smartly styled clothing in size ranges appropriate for them. Those not liking to shop gave inability to find what they wanted as the major reason.

The changes in appearance that come with aging were accepted, but there was a definite dissatisfaction over not being able to purchase clothing that would help the subjects look their best. Twenty-one respondents stated that when they selected clothing, becomingness was more important than fashion, comfort, ease of care, wearing qualities, or cost. Twelve of the women questioned said clothes were more important to them now than at any other period in their life because they now have more time to shop, more money, and more figure faults to camouflage.

Subjects expressed a desire to be well-dressed at all times; with twenty-four stating that they dressed up even though they planned to stay at home alone. House dresses on the market were described as unsatisfactory in style, fabric, and quality of construction.

Interest in fashion was indicated by twenty-six respondents who said that they discussed fashion with their friends and by twenty-eight who read fashion news in magazines and newspapers. The manner in which women responded to questions showed that they were aware of current fashions, were familiar with market offerings, evaluated their wardrobes,

and were interested in making wise choices when wardrobe additions were made. Subjects were not unwilling to accept fashion changes, but they were concerned over finding suitable clothing for older women. They were not as much concerned with aging as they were with the monotonous offerings provided by merchants and clothing manufacturers. Respondents were cooperative during interviews and eager to aid in a study of their clothing problems. The results of the study indicate that interest in clothing remains similar to what it was in youth, and that there is desire for smartly styled, attractive clothing.

Recommendations. The writer recommends that additional studies be made on clothing for older women with representative samples of older people as well as with manufacturers and merchants in the same locality in order to verify reports of market offerings and problems encountered by the women when purchasing clothing. It would be interesting to compare the image of older women held by merchandisers and subjects, in order to arrive at a picture similar to the one held of a "teen-ager" or a "suburbanite." Personal observations by an investigator of treatment given older women while shopping and of the practices used by them would give insight leading to improved practices for both merchandiser and customer. A survey of retirement villages and rehabilitation centers for the purpose of determining how many specialty shops for aged

are in operation as well as the problems and successes of these operations would be valuable in determining the need for special services for the aged.

A study of clothing for older men is also recommended as dissatisfactions in this area were reported by subjects, who had been asked by husbands, to relate clothing problems experienced by them.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. A. How long have you lived in Manhattan? _____
B. Where did you live before?
a) _____ rural farm
b) _____ rural non-farm
c) _____ urban
2. What is your marital status?
a) _____ married
b) _____ widowed
c) _____ single
3. What is your yearly income?
a) _____ under \$1,500.00
b) _____ \$1,500.00 but under \$3,000.00
c) _____ \$3,000.00 but under \$4,500.00
d) _____ \$4,500.00 but under \$6,000.00
e) _____ \$6,000.00 but under \$7,500.00
f) _____ \$7,500.00 but under \$9,000.00
g) _____ \$9,000.00 but under \$10,500.00
h) _____ \$10,500.00 or above
i) _____ don't know
j) _____ no answer
4. What was your age at your last birthday? _____
5. A. Have you worked outside your home?
a) _____ no
b) _____ yes
B. What kind of work did you do? _____
C. Are you working now?
a) _____ no
b) _____ yes
6. What was the last grade you completed in school?
a) _____ less than grade school
b) _____ grade school graduate
c) _____ some high school
d) _____ high school graduate
e) _____ some college
f) _____ college graduate
g) _____ other
7. Do you spend most of your leisure time alone or with others?
a) _____ alone
b) _____ with others

8. A. To what social and religious organizations do you belong?
- a) _____ e) _____
- b) _____ f) _____
- c) _____ g) _____
- d) _____ h) _____
- B. For which organization are clothes most important?
- _____
9. During what period in life have clothes been most important to you?
- a) _____ teens
- b) _____ early adult
- c) _____ middle life
- d) _____ present
- e) _____ same
10. Which of the following is most important to you when selecting clothes?
- a) _____ fashion
- b) _____ becomingness
- c) _____ comfort
- d) _____ ease of care
- e) _____ wearing qualities
- f) _____ cost
11. Do you dress up if you plan to stay at home alone?
- a) _____ usually
- b) _____ sometimes
- c) _____ never
- d) Why? _____
12. What type of clothes do you usually wear around home?
- a) _____ house dress
- b) _____ slacks, shorts, etc.
- c) _____ old "good" dress
- d) _____ house coat
- e) _____ skirt and sweater or blouse.
13. How often do you discuss fashions with your friends?
- a) _____ frequently
- b) _____ sometimes
- c) _____ never
- d) Why? _____

14. How often do you read fashion news in the newspapers and magazines?
a) _____ regularly
b) _____ sometimes
c) _____ never
15. Do you enjoy shopping for clothes?
a) _____ no
b) _____ yes
c) Why? _____
16. When you shop do you take time to look at clothing displays?
a) _____ regularly
b) _____ sometimes
c) _____ never
17. If a fashion show was announced while you were shopping would you be apt to stay for it?
a) _____ no
b) _____ yes
c) Why or why not? _____
18. In your opinion how does the way you are dressed affect the way the sales clerk treats you?

19. A. Do you usually shop alone or with someone?
a) _____ alone
b) _____ with someone
B. If someone shops with you do you ask their advice?
a) _____ no
b) _____ yes
c) Why or why not? _____
20. Where do you shop?
a) _____ local department stores
b) _____ local specialty shop
c) _____ out-of-town stores
d) _____ mail order
e) _____ other
f) Why? _____

21. What are your major problems when you shop? _____

22. Which of these services would you use if they were available?
a) _____ approval service
b) _____ personal shopping service
c) _____ specialty shop for your age group
d) _____ delivery service
e) _____ others _____
23. In your opinion do clothing manufacturers give enough attention to the clothing needs of mature women?
a) _____ no
b) _____ yes
c) Why? _____

24. What suggestions, if any, would you like to make to merchants regarding the clothing they stock?

MAJOR PROBLEMS SUBJECTS ENCOUNTERED WHILE SHOPPING

Waistlines too small
Dresses too long in the waist
Too few choices in half-sizes
Too much fullness in the bust and shoulders in comparison
to waist size
Short skirts
All front openings or back zippers
Duplicate dresses in the same town
Sleeveless dresses
Young styles not appropriate for older women
Poor selection of color for the aging complexion
Necklines too large and too low
Skirts without ease or with excessive pleats and gathers
at the waist
Small sizes were found only in the teen department
Large women found the selection over size fourteen meager
Nondescript prints
Uninteresting styles
Slips lacked fullness and length
Narrow shoes were hard to find

CLOTHING PROBLEMS AND INTERESTS EXPRESSED
BY A SELECTED GROUP OF WOMEN OVER SIXTY
YEARS OF AGE

by

VELDA FRANCES RANKIN

B. S., Kansas State University, 1937

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Clothing and Textiles

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1967

This investigation was designed to examine clothing experiences and problems of a selected group of women sixty or more years of age. Objectives of the study were to learn about the interest in and importance of clothing to the older woman; to identify factors older women say are problems when they shop; to learn what services older women would like to have when they shop; and to compare findings with those reported in similar studies.

Data were obtained by personal interviews conducted during the summer of 1966 in Manhattan, Kansas. Respondents ranged in age from sixty-two to eighty-six years and had lived in Manhattan from four to seventy-seven years. Approximately one-fourth of the women interviewed declined to divulge the amount of income. However, all but one of those reporting income indicated a yearly income of less than \$6,000. Respondents had above average educational attainment for their age and were socially active.

Two-thirds of the women in the study felt the way they were dressed affected the treatment they received from sales clerks. Three-fourths of the subjects shopped alone; few expressed a desire for the support of others when shopping or indicated reduced confidence in their own judgment because of age. Ten (33 per cent) of the women sometimes shopped out of town. Twenty-six (87 per cent) of those interviewed preferred department stores over specialty shops, however, they shopped both types of stores. Twenty subjects

(67 per cent) said they would use a specialty shop for their age group if they could get better fit and styling. Specific problems encountered by respondents when shopping included poorly designed, uninteresting, monotonous garments in unsuitable colors and sizes, and an over-emphasis on clothing for youth.

Becomingness was considered the most important factor when selecting clothing by twenty-one subjects (70 per cent). Twelve (40 per cent) said clothes were of more importance to them at present than during any other period in life because they now have more time to shop, more money to spend, and more age-related figure problems to overcome. They were not as much concerned with aging as with market offerings provided by merchants and clothing manufacturers.

Findings were compared with the 1963 Bader study in Iowa City, Iowa; the 1962 Bartley study in Manhattan, Kansas; and the 1960 Tbeling and Rosencranz study in Lansing, Michigan. Subjects in these studies were similar in age range, income, and social activity. All women interviewed belonged to one or more organizations. Subjects in the Bader study did not belong to organizations for the aged. Tbeling and Rosencranz reported the lack of appropriate clothing reduced the amount of social participation. This was not found in the Kansas studies. Respondents in this study were equally divided in liking and disliking shopping which compared with findings in the Bader study. Tbeling and Rosencranz found that most

subjects enjoyed window shopping.

Subjects in the present study and in the Bader study reported treatment received in stores affected the pleasure derived from shopping. Subjects in both studies had confidence in their own judgment when shopping. Although both groups showed interest in a specialty shop for their age group, the Bader study reported concern over being set aside as an age group. Bartley reported subjects were partially satisfied with merchandise available, while Ubeling and Rosenkrantz said subjects could find half-sizes but the selection was limited. Subjects in the studies of Bader and the writer indicated the stock of half-size dresses was inadequate. House dresses were generally worn at home although criticized in regard to style, workmanship, and quality. Subjects agreed on the importance of satisfactory clothing for the morale of the older woman.

